

**Annual Town Report  
FY 2019**

**HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE**

*Nadaa Ali*

*Cynthia Ganung (Clergy Association,  
IJTF, Diversity Initiative)*

*Kerry Hurwitch (NHS-PTC)*

*Amelia Klein (Diversity Initiative)*

*John Kraemer (liaison – NPD)*

*Christina Mathews (Co-Chair)*

*Tracy McKay*

*Ashok Mehta*

*Jared Pizzuto (NHS)*

*Bud Shram*

*Jennifer Howard Schroeder (Co-Chair)*

*Marlene Schultz*

*Julie Venables*



**CHARGE**

**Human Rights Committee**

*Approved August 12, 2008*

Created in 1995 by the Select Board, the mission of the Human Rights Committee is to address matters pertaining to human and civil rights and problems related to thereto that may arise in the Town.

The charge of the Committee is to:

1. Advocate appreciation and respect for human and civil rights in our Town (Education);
2. Organize and/or recommend community events to constructively promote respect for human and civil rights in our Town (Community Outreach);
3. Provide advice and assistance to the Town Manager, Chief of Police, and/or other Town offices in response to issues that challenge the human and/or civil rights of any individual or group in our Town (Community Response)

## NHRC LOGO



The NHRC logo design, which is universally recognized, combines the shape of a hand with that of a bird (dove). It was created by an international committee for the promotion and protection of human rights.

## MEMBERSHIP

Official members of the Needham Human Rights Committee are Needham residents who volunteer to serve on the Committee. They are appointed by the Select Board.

*The Committee shall consist of 12 members. When practicable, the Committee should include representatives or designees of the Needham Police Department and the Needham Public School Department (ex officio and non-voting), the Needham Commission on Disabilities, and the Needham Housing Authority. Membership should also include a representative of the local clergy, a senior citizen, a tenant of the Needham Housing Authority, a realtor, and a Needham High School student.*

## MEETINGS

Human Rights Committee meetings are usually held the *third Thursday* of each month at Needham Town Hall, Highland Room, 7:30-9:00 pm. Meetings are open to the public and all meeting dates and agendas are posted on the Town website. On occasion, guest speakers are invited by the Committee to share their expertise in the area of human rights. Guest speakers play an important role as resources for planning future NHRC events. The Committee welcomes all Needham residents who are interested in human rights to attend a meeting and to learn about the work of the Committee.

## COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Organizing and sponsoring community events and educational forums related to human rights plays a major role in the work of the NHRC. Following are highlights for the Fiscal Year 2019.

***Conversations At My Neighbor's Table Potluck Series Oct 21, 2018 Temple Beth Shalom***



**At My Neighbor's Table:  
A Vegetarian Potluck on Cultural  
Appropriation and Appreciation**

*It's very important to know the neighbor next door and the people down the street and the people in another race. ~ Maya Angelou* Needham residents participated in a conversation over a meal about conflicting views of cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation. “Cultural appropriation harms cultures when a prevailing culture adopts things from a different culture without interpreting them, or manipulates them in ways that contradict the origins, and substitutes the dominant culture's idea of what the other culture is like.” Examples of the misuse of sensitive cultural material were shared, including incidents which occurred in the town of Needham. Participants of diverse backgrounds provided examples of cultural *appreciation* that presented alternative views. The event was co-sponsored by Temple Beth Shalom, First Parish in Needham Unitarian Universalist, Bahá’i Community in Needham, Presbyterian Church of Needham, Needham Human Rights Committee, Needham Diversity Initiative, and Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries. Members of the NHRC served on the planning committee, and one member was a co-host for the evening program.

***Needham 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Diversity Summit – November 17, 2018 Pollard Middle School***







(Photos courtesy Needham Diversity Initiative, Inc. [needhamdiversity.org](http://needhamdiversity.org))

The Needham Diversity Summit, an annual event organized by the Needham Diversity Initiative, Inc. brings together community leaders, friends, neighbors and students to explore, foster, strengthen and celebrate Needham's diversity - of socioeconomic status, race, sexual orientation, gender (including identity and expression), religion, ethnic identity, ability and age. The Summit attempts to empower groups that may otherwise feel unable or that lack the confidence to share their experiences and voices, and to challenge its residents to think in new ways about the Town's evolving community. The 2019 Summit featured a diverse panel of Needham residents who spoke about their experiences living in Needham. Special guests Ron Jones, Emmy Award-winning actor and writer, performed parts of his one-man/10 characters play *"The Movement"*, and teacher/Facing History blogger/author Jessica Landers spoke about the challenges of teaching equity, justice and bias to her student audiences. Organizations and groups in the Needham Community who work with diverse populations set up exhibits that highlighted the important role they play in the Needham Community! The NHRC was a co-sponsor of the day-long event. NHRC members served on the Diversity Summit Planning Committee and attended and hosted the Diversity Summit. NHRC members also participated in workshop sessions, an integral part of the Diversity Summit program, and a member of the Committee was invited to be a guest panelist.

***Martin Luther King Jr. Day Celebration - January 27, 2019 Needham High School***



(Photos courtesy of Needham Diversity Initiative, Inc. [needhamdiversity.org](http://needhamdiversity.org))

Hosted by the Needham Diversity Initiative, this annual family friendly event celebrates the legacy and the life and achievement of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The central focus of the MLK Day is children. Most of the performances are by or for children of all ages. Music was an



integral part of the 2019 celebration, with performances by the *Plugged In* teen band, *Making Music Matter*, *Bellevue Community Church of Nashville*, and *Temple Beth Shalom Youth Choir*, group singing lead by Brother Dennis Slaughter, and a dance performance by the *Origination Cultural Arts Center* to Honor Dr. King. Middle school students conducted a ceremony of lighting candles in honor of those who have inspired them. NHRC was a co-sponsor of the celebration. Committee members served on the MLK Day Planning Committee, organized and provided refreshments, and attended the event. Additional co-sponsors of the event were the Needham Clergy Association and the Needham School Department and its METCO Program.

***Conversations At My Neighbor's Table Potluck Series – March 24, 2019 Temple Beth Shalom***



**It Happened Here: Slavery in Needham**

*Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.*

[Henry Ford]. The sixth of a series of potluck dinners around the theme: "Conversations at My Neighbor's Table" took place at Temple Beth Shalom. Guests learned about the history of slavery in Needham (documents indicated the presence of slaves and slaveholders) and engaged in small group conversations about *how to reckon with, seek renewal, and reconcile the remnants of a town's past*. Special guest speakers were Gloria Greis, Executive Director of the Needham History Center and Museum, and Rev. Darrell Hamilton of First Baptist Church in Jamaica Plain. Sponsors of the potluck conversation were Temple Beth Shalom, First Parish in Needham Unitarian Universalist, Bahá'í Community of Needham, Presbyterian Church of Needham, First Baptist Church of Needham, Christ Episcopal Church, Carter Memorial United Methodist Church, Needham Diversity Initiative, Needham Human Rights Committee and Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries. A member of the NHRC chaired the planning committee for the event.





***Race Amity Day: Town of Needham - June 9, 2019 Needham Historical Center and Museum.***



**Race Amity Day Proclamation - Town Hall**

RACE AMITY DAY is an officially recognized day in Massachusetts – held annually on the second Sunday of June in cities and towns across the Commonwealth. Amity means *friendship*. Race Amity Day is observed to overcome racial prejudice through association and collaboration, and to encourage and advocate for cross racial/cross cultural friendships. RAD was organized and celebrated through a joint effort between the Towns of Needham and Wellesley, and was hosted by the Needham Diversity Initiative and World of Wellesley. The 2019 celebration, held at the Needham History Center and Museum, welcomed Boston METCO families as special guests. A documentary about the history of METCO was shown. Participants shared food and conversations together. Brief remarks were presented by NDI officers, State Rep. Denise Garlick and State Senator Becca Rausch. The program included singing by Baha'i Children, and concluded with songs by the Treble Rebels, a Needham High School A Capella group. The NHRC was a co-sponsor of the event.

***Suitcase Stories - June 19, 2019 Temple Beth Shalom***





*Suitcase Stories Live* was a storytelling performance organized by IINE – the International Institute of New England – and Temple Beth Shalom in Needham. The purpose of the event was to honor refugees and immigrants. Invited speakers were foreign and U.S.-born residents who shared “tales of hope and pursuit of life in America.” The presentations broadened the audience’s awareness of the many ways that immigrant roots affect both individuals and a whole community. The event was held at Temple Beth Shalom. The NHRC was a supporting partner for the event. NHRC members helped publicize the program, and served as volunteers to organize and facilitate program activities.



Story-tellers gather for a group picture  
(Photo: Hometown Weekly)

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

In pursuing its mission, the NHRC seeks opportunities to collaborate - and develop on-going relationships - with groups in the Needham Community. Following are examples of ways the NHRC has made efforts to reach out to both official and non-official Town Committees and organizations.

- **NEEDHAM HOUSING AUTHORITY** Members of the NHRC have had on-going conversations with the Executive Director and the Resident Services Coordinator to discuss common interests and means of support. The Committee’s goal is to learn about the needs of residents living in NHA units, and how well residents of Needham public housing are integrated into the Community. The Committee continues to seek candidates who are

residents of the Needham Housing Authority to serve on the NHRC, and has collaborated with NHA officials in promoting resident representation on the Committee.

- **MEDIA SOURCES** The NHRC has developed close links with the local media. Direct contact with editors and journalists in the past has helped the Committee promote its events and generate interest in human rights. The Hometown Weekly has consistently responded to press releases and published lead articles about Committee events in a timely fashion. The Needham Times on occasion has highlighted the NHRC in guest columns. The Committee continues to reach out to the NT by meeting the staff, learning how and when to send press releases and calendar listings, and how to present a story about their work. Additionally, the NHRC launched its own Facebook page to publicize events and promote understanding of human rights issues in the community.
- **NEEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS** Members of the Committee have met with the Superintendent and Needham Public School officials and staff to discuss ways to collaborate and to share resources. The NHRC is committed to developing on-going relationships with school personnel and students. Their input is critical in the planning of educational forums which address the challenges faced by youth in our community. Dr. Gutekanst has attended many NHRC meetings and has kept the Committee informed about major initiatives and activities in the NPS, particularly updates related to the Needham Equity Report. The NHRC provides opportunities for NHS students to take on leadership roles as members of the Committee, and to take initiative in providing student participation and input in the planning of events. The Needham High School representative who serves on the Committee provides an important link to faculty and student groups. The NHRC participated in several school events during the past year.

**NPS Professional Day Assembly** Nov. 21, 2018 *Needham High School*  
Superintendent Dan Gutekanst invited members of the NHRC to attend a special NPS Professional Day keynote address given by Beverly Daniel Tatum. Dr. Tatum is an award-winning educational leader, best-selling author, and noted expert on the psychology of racism. She is the author of *Can We Talk About Race?* and *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* Her presentation focused on race in education.

**Community Forum: Racial Equity in Action** April 24, 2019 *Needham High School*  
The Forum was hosted by the Needham Public Schools for the purpose of sharing updates on the equity work that happened over the past year, and as an opportunity for community members to ask questions. The NHRC was a supporting member of the forum.

**Representation on NPS Committee** FY 2019-2020 *Needham Public Schools* A member of the NHRC was invited to participate in a Needham Public School District conference entitled *Portrait of a Needham Graduate*. Students, educators, parents, business and civic leaders were invited to share their perspectives about how to prepare

students for jobs and life-long learning. The goal of the conference is to shape a vision for the future of education in the Needham community.

**Parent Teacher Council** A member of the NHRC has served as president of the Needham High School PTC.

**REAL Coalition** A co-chair of the NHRC has served as a member of a School District-wide team: Race, Equity, Access & Leadership (REAL), whose purpose is to lead the work and conversations around equity in the Needham Public Schools and classrooms. The NHRC is a partner of the Coalition.

- **CITIZENS FOR NEEDHAM SCHOOLS** Citizens for Needham Schools, NHRC and the Needham Diversity Initiative co-sponsored the Racial Equity in Action Community Forum on April 24, 2019. Over 50 members of the community were present. Needham Public School administrators and teachers shared how they were implementing action items that resulted from the equity audit.
- **NEEDHAM COUNCIL ON AGING** The co-chairs of the NHRC have corresponded with the Executive Director of the Council on Aging to plan events at the Center at the Heights to accommodate the needs of older adults. The Director has been supportive in helping the Committee reserve dates and space at the Center to host key events. The Center staff members have generously given their time and energy in organizing and facilitating event activities.
- **NEEDHAM DIVERSITY INITIATIVE, Inc.** The Needham Diversity Initiative (NDI) is a grass-roots, community organization of individuals who live, work, study - or whose children study - in Needham. Many are educators and have been involved with diversity training in the past (e.g., via their profession or membership in Needham's Human Rights Committee, Needham Clergy Association, or Immigration Justice Task Force). The NDI organizes on-going events, workshops, and community forums which provide opportunities for residents of Needham to learn about the diverse populations within their community, to examine diversity issues, and to build diverse coalitions. Two members of the NHRC serve on the Board of the Needham Diversity Initiative. The NHRC has been an annual co-sponsor of the Needham Diversity Summit and the Martin Luther King Day Celebration. The NHRC has co-sponsored many of the events organized by the NDI during the past year. (See Sponsored Community Events section.)
- **NEEDHAM CLERGY ASSOCIATION** One member of the NHRC is an active member of the Needham Clergy Association. Both groups have shared information about their work with members of their respective organizations, and have supported and attended public events organized by each group. This past year, the NHRC was a co-sponsor of two community potluck conversations held at Temple Beth Shalom. (See Community Education section.)
- **NEEDHAM IMMIGRATION JUSTICE TASK FORCE** One member of the NHRC is a member of the Immigration Justice Task Force and has been an important link to the group.



The NHRC has supported the activities of the IJTF and has attended and co-sponsored events they have organized. The work of the IJTF is relevant to the work of the Committee: both groups are advocates for human rights. The IJTF has been an important source of information about current issues and actions taken in relation to immigration policies, many that involve residents and employees in the Town of Needham.

- **NEEDHAM FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY** In October 2016, the Needham Public Library Trustees and a Board Member presented information to the NHRC about the Library's desire to promote respect for diversity in the town through programming and educational forums. The Needham Human Rights Committee, along with the Needham Diversity Initiative, has been an on-going cosponsor of the Library Book Forum series featuring special guest discussion leaders and Pollard Middle School students. NHRC members led several of the discussion groups.

#### **Diversity and Discussion Book Group Presentations**

*Refugee* by Alan Gratz on September 26, 2018 at Pollard Middle School and again on March 14, 2019 at the Library. The powerful novel told the story of three children seeking refuge. Members of the audience included Pollard Middle School students and their parents.

*Tomorrow Will Be Different* by Sarah McBride on October 11, 2018 at the Library. This memoir described one person's journey to bring attention to the needs and rights of transgender individuals in our country.

*Blood at the Root* written by Patrick Phillips on January 10, 2019, investigating the 1912 Racial Conflict of Forsyth County, Georgia.

*Evicted: Poverty and Profit in an American City* by Matthew Desmond. A NHRC member led a book discussion on May 16, 2019 about eight families struggling to keep their homes. The discussion focused on poor people lacking basic needs, food, clothing and shelter, and their downward spiral caused by a social system that offers little hope for getting ahead.

- **REPRESENTATIVE DENISE GARLICK** NHRC prepared a letter with support from Rep. Garlick, Sen. Becca Rausch, Sen. Michael Rush, and the Select Board of Needham in response to the Chabad House Arson, which took place in Needham on May 17, 2019. The statement was posted on the NHRC Town webpage. NHRC shared a display table with Rep. Garlick at the Needham *Spring Street Fair* on June 1, 2019 to talk to community members about the work of the NHRC and to give out lawn signs showing the message "No Place For Hate".

#### **HUMAN RIGHTS RESOURCE GROUPS**

The NHRC has kept informed about human rights issues by connecting to regional organizations and groups who serve as resources to the Committee. These resources enhance the work of the Committee in planning educational forums, and in responding to issues that challenge the human rights of any individual or group in the Needham Community.

- **MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND RELATIONS COMMISSIONS (MAHRC)** The Massachusetts Association of Human Rights and Relations Commissions is an organization of municipal and local agencies responsible for promoting human and civil rights and harmonious relationships among diverse groups at a local level. The mission of MAHRC is to provide local and statewide leadership in the areas of human rights and intergroup relationships. MAHRC accomplishes this charge by promoting networking initiatives, developing educational strategies and model programs; and serving as a resource for new and existing human rights and relations commissions.
- **PEOPLE AGAINST TRAFFICKING of HUMANS (PATH)** Needham PATH's mission is to prevent human trafficking in Needham and in Norfolk County. Their goal is to raise awareness through education, advocacy and collaboration. From the beginning Needham PATH has had a strong relationship with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Victim Assistance Program. PATH continues to develop ongoing collaboration with other agencies within our local communities. There is a great need to educate the public to be able to recognize the risk factors and indicators which exist in our communities that are "hidden in plain sight". Many Needham PATH members have been trained by organizations such as the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and are available for speaking engagements to educate and raise awareness about human trafficking. One member of the Committee is a member of the organization.
- **NEEDHAM GREEN COLLABORATIVE** The Needham Green Collaborative reached out the Needham Human Rights Committee to see how the committee could pledge to be "greener" in the following year. The Committee discussed making sure there is a green component to every event it hosts, such as recycling table cloths and making sure there is a recycle bin available. Additionally, the Committee agreed to the immediate action of no longer printing meeting agendas for its members; individual members may choose to print the agenda if they would like to, but others may look at it on computers and tablets.

### **COMMUNITY RESPONSE**

In meeting its charge to provide advice and assistance to the Town Manager, Chief of Police, and/or other Town offices, the Needham Human Rights Committee has supported community efforts that promote inclusivity, and has participated in community initiatives in response to acts of hate and bias.



**Response to Acts of Hate and Bias in Needham** NHRC joined community residents at a havdallah service to show solidarity with the Chabad Jewish Center of Needham. The vigil was held outside the home of a rabbi who was affected by one of three fires intentionally set at local Jewish institutions in Arlington and Needham.

*Statement from the Needham Human Rights Committee, Select Board and State Delegates  
May 19, 2019*

We have seen growing intolerance in the world around us, and an increase in anti-Semitic incidents elsewhere, and now in our town.

Hate has no home in Needham. The Needham Human Rights Committee, the Select Board of the Town of Needham and Needham's Massachusetts state delegation express our profound sadness and deep concern in response to the attempted arson at the Chabad Jewish Center in Needham, which is also home to the Rabbi and his family.

The Needham Police Department, along with state and federal authorities, are investigating this incident and two other arson attempts that occurred this week at the Chabad Center for Jewish Life in Arlington, as potential hate crimes.



We stand together with our Jewish neighbors and Jewish houses of worship who have been targeted by these hateful acts. The Human Rights Committee and the Select Board are resolute in our commitment to furthering understanding and compassion in this community.

May we each serve as a beacon for peace, may our households be a force for good, and may our town be a welcome place for all.

Needham Human Rights Committee, Select Board of the Town of Needham,  
Rep. Denise Garlick, Sen. Mike Rush, Sen. Becca Rausch

**Preserving the Rights of Transgender Individuals in MA** NHRC co-sponsored A *Conversation on Preserving Transgender Rights in Massachusetts* with Sarah McBride and representatives from Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, Yes on 3 Campaign, Riverside Community Care, OutMetroWest and local clergy. NHRC read a statement in support of upholding existing protections promised to transgender individuals by the current Massachusetts laws. The event was co-sponsored by the Needham Transgender Coalition: Newton Needham Regional Chamber, OUT MetroWest, Progressive Needham, Temple Beth Shalom, First Parish in Needham UU, Congregational Church of Needham UUC, League of Women Voters of Needham, Needham Diversity Initiative, Needham Human Rights Committee, Greater Boston PFLAG, Christ Episcopal Church, Freedom for All MA, and the First Baptist Church in Needham. NHRC was directed to withdraw from the Needham Transgender Coalition based on the opinion that membership in this Coalition was too political. The Coalition wanted to support the Medicare for All event and NHRC was unable to do that, and subsequently withdrew.

*Statement of the Needham Human Rights Committee in support of preserving important human rights of our transgender and non-gender conforming friends, family and neighbors*

The Needham Human Rights Committee stands proudly beside all in Massachusetts fighting to preserve the basic human rights of all transgender and gender non-conforming people. While we strive to create a more perfect union, where all individuals are able to in fact live free from prejudice, ignorance, and hate, the Needham Human Rights Committee recognizes that an important step toward this aspiration is upholding existing, essential, legal protections guarding the rights of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals in Massachusetts to be, undisturbed, in any public place they chose. Affirming the right to privacy and live free of discrimination, honors the human dignity inherent in all. Rescinding these fundamental rights, serves to divest our neighbors of their essential humanity and exacerbates the danger many live with every day. The Needham Human Rights Committee urges our community to join the effort to uphold the current Public Accommodations Law in Massachusetts, guaranteeing continued equal protection under the law for all transgender and gender non-conforming individuals in the Commonwealth.